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SUBJECT: SERBIA: PARTICIPATION IN RCC ON TRACK

REF: 08 SARAJEVO 1893

Summary

1. (SBU) The Serbian government is redefining institutional structures and priorities to actively participate in the Sarajevo-based Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). Serbia's deputy RCC national coordinator told us that Serbian ministries are beginning to coordinate and de-conflict prospective RCC projects while defining priorities in areas including environment and transportation. Despite a positive view of the RCC's prospects, Kosovo participation without UNMIK in the RCC will continue to be a sticking point. End Summary.

Belgrade Satisfied with RCC Progress

2. (SBU) Serbia's deputy national coordinator for the RCC and deputy director of the MFA's Regional Initiatives Directorate, Jasminka Kronja, told us on January 8 that Serbia was satisfied with the pace the RCC had taken since its establishment last year. Comparing the RCC with the Stability Pact (with which she and her boss, national coordinator Malina Jovasevic, had extensive experience), Kronja described the RCC as the implementation arm of political fora, such as the Southeastern Europe Cooperation Process (SEECF); its primary success has been establishing lines of communication with these bodies.

3. (SBU) Belgrade expects the RCC, as the European Commission's "window on Southeastern Europe," to take the lead on defining regional priorities for the reforms necessary for member states to achieve European and Euro-Atlantic integration, Kronja said. (She emphasized the Euro-Atlantic integration aspect of the RCC several times during our meeting.) Kronja estimated that the RCC would act quickly within the year on the Regional Fire-Fighting Center and Risk Insurance, but cautioned that such projects always proceeded slowly. Kronja also said that the gas crisis would likely create attention in member governments that would speed up the RCC's work on energy security cooperation.

Serbia Coordinating Institutions, Objectives

4. (SBU) Kronja said that Serbia was defining its priority areas for the RCC and undergoing an institutional reordering to facilitate regional cooperation, an idea which she described as "long in the air" but with little concrete understanding on how to achieve it. The national coordinator for the RCC, the MFA's Marina Jovasevic, was thus leading an effort to create a regional cooperation body within the Serbian government consisting of representatives from all ministries that dealt with regional issues so as to coordinate and de-conflict regional initiatives, while ensuring compliance with Serbia's National Plan for EU Integration. As part of explaining

the RCC to entities within the Serbian government, the MFA hosted a presentation by RCC experts in November that described RCC priority areas and was well-attended by representatives from various ministries.

15. (SBU) Although Serbia's proposals for the RCC were not yet defined, Kronja said that Serbia would likely seek to establish a regional climate change center in Belgrade that would focus on regional environmental issues. She said that Serbia would also benefit from cooperation on Corridor 10 as a way to improve infrastructure and create jobs. In addition, she noted that the Ministry of Information was interested in working to establish an Information Society and e-government Center modeled on the center in Ljubljana, though admitted that such investments in education and human capital were the most difficult to win political support for during times of economic crisis.

"Normal" Kosovo Participation with UNMIK  
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16. (SBU) Kronja predicted that the RCC would be able to help countries in the region overcome bilateral disputes in large part because the RCC provided technical expertise and was not as politicized as other regional bodies, namely the SEECP. Kosovo was key to many of the RCC projects in energy and environment, she said, and Kosovo participated "completely normally" in all of the RCC's work in accordance with the "clear procedure" that Kosovo's participation only occurred with UNMIK in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1244. Any changes in the manner of Kosovo representation could occur only if UNSCR 1244 were amended, she added.

Comment

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17. (SBU) We are encouraged by the effort the Serbian government appears to be making to establish the RCC as an effective instrument of regional cooperation and Euro-Atlantic integration. Deconflicting ministerial equities in regional issues and defining concrete projects is productive for Serbia and the RCC. Kronja's and Jovasevic's experience with the Stability Pact and EU integration is an added bonus. Unfortunately the Serbian formula of working through UNMIK does not reflect the new reality on the ground in Kosovo and the RCC needs to address this issue. Failure to find a practical solution to Kosovo participation threatens to derail all the good work the RCC is designed to accomplish. End Comment.

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